

MINUTES

MANSFIELD ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

Monday, March 27, 2006

Mansfield Town Hall

6:30-8:30 PM

PRESENT: K. Grunwald (staff), S. Baxter (staff), K. Stone, R. Leclerc (staff), P. Wheeler, J. Goldman, S. Tucker, S. Patwa
REGRETS: M. J. Newman, A. Bladen, A. Blair, D. McLaughlin, M. Dickson, S. Daley, N. Hovorka, B. Lehmann

I. INTRODUCTIONS/MINUTES:

- A. Introductions: in the absence of an apparent quorum and the lack of a Chair the group agreed to begin the meeting informally.
- B. Adoption of minutes of February 28, 2006: no comments; once a quorum was formed the minutes were accepted as written.

II. COMMUNICATIONS (Consent Agenda, unless otherwise noted)

- A. Announcement: ECSU Child Development Center: S. Baxter reported that if people are interested she will arrange a time for MAC members to tour this new Center. Terri Lawrence (Director) had also offered to include this Center in Mansfield's School Readiness Program. Some question was raised as to whether or not we can use SR funds to send children to a Center outside of Town. There was some discussion as to whether or not it would be advantageous to add a fifth Center to the program. P. Wheeler mentioned that this could mean children from other towns possibly coming to Centers in Mansfield using school readiness slots from their towns of residence. S. Baxter will determine whether or not we can do this.

III. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Full-Day Kindergarten report to the Board of Education: in the absence of J. Buck S. Baxter distributed copies of Joan's notes from the presentation. R. Leclerc stated that the full-day program is going well; teachers have noted that kids appear to be more advanced in the curriculum. Half-day children can return in the afternoon for special programs. Some concerns have been raised about class size (20-21); the feeling was expressed that some children may have left private centers to enroll in the public schools now that full-day is available.
- B. Report on Dan Malloy Public Education Forum: J. Goldman felt that Mayor DeStefano focused more specifically on early childhood and the importance of workforce development to the State. Mayor Malloy talked about the importance of health insurance for all children; did not display the same depth of understanding of early childhood issues. P. Wheeler liked Malloy's presentation. K. Grunwald reported that we have sent an invitation to Gov. Rell's office but have not heard back from them. J. Goldman suggested hosting a forum for the Congressional candidates from this district as well. P. Wheeler mentioned that she was put off by Malloy's comments about the fact that only certified teachers can educate young children, and would like to contact him to clarify this issue.
- C. Asperger's Syndrome Seminar (K. Vallo, S. Daley): Neither Kate nor Susan were present to talk about this training, which was offered to teachers from the Centers during the school system's professional development day. R. Leclerc reported that the trainers do outreach for the Eden Institute. They gave an overview of autism and then provided tips and techniques for dealing with autistic children in the classroom. One of the trainers has written the autism guidelines for the State of CT, and Rachel has been making them available to parents. The guidelines are available at [www.state.ct.gov/ Dept. of Education/Special Education](http://www.state.ct.gov/Dept.ofEducation/SpecialEducation) section. The guidelines are primarily provided for parents and staff. There will be a two-week class offered this summer on identifying autism in children; they are looking for teams of 3 from each school district. S. Patwa mentioned that Windham is looking at starting an autism program.
- D. Small Group Break-Out Sessions:
 - "Week of the Young Child" activities: S. Baxter announced that NAEYC has designated the first week of April, with the theme of "Building Better Futures for Young Children". Sandy asked if anyone would be willing to write a letter to the editor, and to look at other activities that we may want to sponsor. Some members felt that it seems contrived to just

recognize young children for a week, and that planning activities and events would require much more time than we have. P. Wheeler suggested that the Fun Fair could be moved to April as a kick-off event for this week next year. J. Goldman suggested involving a number of different organizations (library, museum, Community Center, dairy bar, animal barns, etc.) and encouraging families to visit as many of these locations as possible. S. Baxter reported that providers feel that the fun fair does not meet their needs for recruitment, and if this is the goal then there may be a need to change it. She did an informal survey at the event, and one parent talked about the needs of international families to get information about how the public school system functions here. J. Goldman suggested that maybe the Fun Fair should be maintained primarily as a social event. Sandy also talked about using the day of the fun fair for voluntary open houses at the Centers and family care homes. K. Stone asked about how the kindergartens could be included in this. If this is incorporated into the Week of the Young Child then each Center could host an activity as a part of the celebration. K. Grunwald suggested structuring some activities for international families to pair with non-international families.

- Parent Recruitment: J. Goldman is pursuing scheduling some family activities at Northwood Apartments. Several of these families include stay-at-home parents with no cars. There was a suggestion to have story hours scheduled there. Another suggestion was to host events in people's apartments. S. Baxter will pursue these ideas.

IV. PROGRAM UPDATES

- A. School Readiness: the FY 07 grant application is out, and is due May 19. Sandy handed out a list of proposed legislation affecting young children. S. Tucker mentioned that there was a proposed bill to expand Birth-3 services to include at-risk children (would not need to be identified with special needs), which did not make it out of committee.
- B. Discovery: It has been difficult to get attendance at Discovery events, and they have been cancelled for the month of March. There was a transition event planned, and that may be rescheduled.

V. OLD BUSINESS

- A. "Other": there has been significant interest in the parenting classes that are being offered by Ruth Freeman. There is a

possibility of offering a second session, but the grant would not cover the cost of this. The Town would be interested in pursuing a small grant to subsidize the cost of this if MAC is interested in pursuing this. S. Patwa pointed out that Natchaug Hospital offers the STEP program for free, but they do not offer childcare. We will get more information about the cost of this program and look at the possibility of pursuing funding. S. Patwa suggested that local medical practices may be a source of funding.

P. Wheeler distributed a list of eleven training videos that have been purchased for professional development. They will be made available for distribution through the library, and Pam has prepared an evaluation form for people who use the videos.

- VI. Next Meeting(s)- 4/27/06, 5/24/06, 6/28/06, NO MEETING JULY, 8/23/06.
- Meetings are held from 6:30- 8:30 PM at a location to be determined. Additional meetings may be scheduled as needed, or removed as not needed.
- VII. Adjournment: the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kevin Grunwald